

Principles of Mission Command Applied to Civil Military Relationships

A Monograph

by

COL Brian Keith Pruitt
United States Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: COL Brian Keith Pruitt

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Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Dr. Barry M. Stentiford, PhD

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
James C. Markert, COL

Accepted this 25th day of May 2017 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Prisco R. Hernandez, PhD

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Abstract

Principles of Mission Command Applied to Civil Military Relations, by COL Brian Keith Pruitt, United States Army, 37 pages.

This monograph examines the six principles of mission command that have the potential to influence the relationship between civilian and military stakeholders. To make informed decisions that affect national security, the President and his civilian staff should apply philosophy and the principles of mission command to have shared understanding and trust with the military. The military, in turn, needs to reciprocate this effort to create cohesion which builds effective civil-military teams. Civil-military relations theory explores and explains why tension exists, but does not fill the gap to recommend solutions that will mitigate discord and improve the working relationships between United States military and civilian leaders. The purpose of applying the principles of mission command and the mission command philosophy to civil military relationships is to demonstrate their universal relevance and significance in today's operational environment.

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Introduction

One of the significant roles that senior military officials have is to advise civilian leaders and politicians on the means by which they can employ the Armed Forces to meet the policy makers' goals. This advisory role has increased implications in times of conflict. In United States history, there have been times when the civilian and military individuals do not agree with each other's recommendations or preferred courses of action. There have been notable cases of mutual frustration in the United States government between policy makers and their military advisors. This dissention, at times between the president and senior military officers, has the potential to inhibit the president's ability to make timely strategic decisions that affect national security. What appears to be dysfunctional personality dynamics or a political argument between the commander-in-chief and his military advisors can sometimes be a deeper institutional and cultural problem.

The military officer has certain expectations about how to construct the best military advice for the president. These views are deeply embedded into the organizational culture and hard-wired into the incredibly detailed military planning process. This process comes with expectations about the roles that military leadership will play in providing guidance, which are in many ways do not synch with the expectations of the president and his civilian advisors. This linear military planning process does not fully integrate the political and social context of a situation, the political environment, or the consequences on public perceptions of national policy. Ultimately, the output of the military's planning process fails to deliver the distinct type of advice in the form of creative options that the president needs. These factors cause turmoil, arguments, and disagreements between United States leadership. Moreover, these factors inevitably contribute to civil-military tension. There are theories that drive the conversation and attempt to explore new ways of mitigating tension between senior military officials and civilian leaders. Of these theories, the element of developing trust and shared understanding is underemphasized. The principles of mission command applied to civil-military relationships begins with building that trust.

Working Hypothesis

Applying the principles of mission command to civil-military relations will create an environment of trust and confidence and decrease recurring tension. The United States military should understand and apply the principles of Mission Command to its professional relationships with policy makers, and politicians should reciprocate those actions to build relationships and establish trust – thus creating a mission command theory of civil-military relations. Without cohesive relationships, shared understanding, and mutual trust, the communication between civilian and military officials becomes broken and leads to dysfunction and distrust between United States leadership. This breakdown in communication has the potential to cause mission failure and most certainly contributes to the distrust between the nation's senior leaders.

Building trust and developing shared understanding will enable the United States' strategic leaders to make the right decisions in the right place at the right time. The citizens of the United States must be able to trust that their political and military leaders have relationships that build on America's morals and principles, and the American people must trust that the nation's leaders will make the right decisions in the interest of national security.

Civil-Military Theory Literature Review

This section will examine civil-military theories and their relation to current mission command principles. Studying and comparing past theories creates the discussion of a mission command approach to civil-military relations. The application of mission command principles to civil-military relationships and theory has the potential to prevent tension and promote cohesive teams. While historians trace civil-military theory to Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz, the beginning of modern civil-military theory came into academia because of the Cold War and the strategic decision for the United States to maintain a full-time, professional Army. Samuel P. Huntington began writing on the subject of civil-military relations in the 1950s. He discussed whether a liberal democracy could maintain a large military structure without violating the

Constitution, which establishes civilian control of the military. Following Huntington, many civil-military theorists arose, providing common and differing views.

According to Carl von Clausewitz, in his philosophical book, *On War*, the nature of civil-military relations is contingent upon the nature of war, why countries go to war, and who goes to war. Governments determine the political aims of war while the military is the means to conduct such a war. Clausewitz considered war to be an extension of policy and the military that fights is subordinate to that policy. He analyzed the nature of war in its full political and social context. He stated, “Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that has created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa.”¹ Therefore, the military is subordinate to the civilian policy makers. The extent of subordination depends on the manner of the society and the nature of the war itself.

Clausewitz thought that war was fundamentally a human endeavor and that humanity governed war with emotion and uncertainty. Clausewitz also believed that a country should never enter a war that it does not intend to win - the country should be able to describe a desired end-state before deploying troops to a conflict with no description of success. The principle of mission command, provide a clear commanders intent, speaks to this situation, and should give civilian leaders the motivation and purpose to define an end-state clearly to the military. This allows the military to determine the means necessary to achieve the end-state and meet the intent. Samuel P. Huntington stated, “Military establishments want political leaders to set forth reasonably clear goals and policies. If political leaders fail to do this, chiefs of staff have to make their own assumptions and develop their plans and program accordingly.”² Clausewitz contributed some of the most significant fundamentals for civil-military theory and the philosophy of mission command.

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 733.

² Samuel P. Huntington, Letter reprinted in “Exchange on Civil Military Relations,” *The National Interest*, No. 36 (Summer 1994): 28.

In turn, the information that the military provides to civilian leadership shapes their understanding of the security environment. This information or advice is often vital to national security and politicians should consider, at a minimum, the military leaders' recommendations. When politicians provide military commanders open access and direct communication, there is a higher chance for civil-military cooperation. In response to that open and direct communication, senior military officers must provide civilian leaders with situational understanding that is accurate, and provide them with all of the strategic possibilities. The military must determine the likelihood of success when using force to implement policy. When giving advice, the military must be able to trust that civilians are using their advice to make decisions and are considering different options. There is potential for conflict when the military think politicians make decisions based on electoral politics. This same conflict can occur if civilian leaders think the military is insensitive to political considerations when providing advice on the deployment of forces during times of conflict.

While senior military leaders have the advisory role, some theorists question the military's role in US policymaking. According to Douglas V. Johnson, and Steven Metz, authors of *American Civil-Military Relations: New Issues, Enduring Problems*, "Some analysts feel that the military ethos of duty and devotion, when combined with officers' extensive education in world affairs and national security policy, justify an expanded role for the military in policymaking."³ Other theorists argue the opposite. Richard H. Kohn stated that, "The military must abandon participation in public debate about foreign and military policy, stop building alliances amongst the public and in Congress for defense spending- and resist the temptation to maneuver in the bureaucracy to achieve its own ends, however commendable."⁴ However, the nature of military operations often compels the professional officer to unintentionally stray into the political realm.

³ Douglas V. Johnson and Steven Metz, *American Civil-Military Relations: New Issues, Enduring Problems* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995): 17.

⁴ Richard H. Kohn, "An Exchange on Civil-Military Relations" *The National Interest* (Academic OneFile, 1994): 23.

Dominant Views and Leading Authorities

Samuel P. Huntington published his influential work *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* in 1957, which became one of the most prominent civil-military theories of modern times. His theory is widely regarded to be the modern foundation on civil-military relations. The focus of Huntington's theory of civil-military relations is the professionalism of the military and officers as professionals. Huntington stated, "...the distinguishing characteristics of a profession as a special type of vocation are its expertise, responsibility, and corporateness."⁵ A professional is someone who is an expert in a specific field who is competent and maintains social responsibility. The military officer as a professional serves the Constitution, and is therefore subordinate to civilian control. A potential issue with civilian control of the military is differentiating between discipline in following orders and blind obedience. In Huntington's theory, a significant challenge is giving the military professional the ability to question his superiors. Huntington's theory primarily focuses on civilian control over the military: objective control versus subjective control.

Under objective control, there is a clear distinction of the political power between the military and civilian counterparts, and the military is a tool of the state. There are three responsibilities of the military under objective control. The military must express their opinion for preserving national security. They must also provide advice on the courses of action that the civilians develop. Finally, they must execute the orders of the state. Under objective control, there is little to no military participation in politics. The more that the military gets involved in politics, the less control the civilians are likely to have. The military is generally not concerned with politics and governance, but they are concerned about politicians' goals. While military officers are subordinate to civilian leaders, they must have autonomy over military affairs. For military leaders

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957): 8.

to maintain a subordinate role to civilian leadership, they must be able to trust them and have a complete understanding of their task, and more importantly- their purpose.

When dealing with the relationship of objective control and subordination, the principles of mission command can significantly contribute to success or failure. When the military professional develops mutual trust with civilian leaders, it creates less tension over who is in control. It also requires shared understanding on the part of the military under objective control so that the officer can understand the position from which a civilian is making decisions. Building cohesive teams through mutual trust between the military and civilians leaders sets a climate of success. In order to exercise disciplined initiative, the military professional must be operating with dedication and obedience to the state. According to Huntington, “The military professional exists to serve the state. To render the highest possible service, the entire profession and the military force which it leads must be constituted as an effective instrument of state policy.”⁶

Huntington described the two levels of civil-military relations that determine the conditions that will maximize military professionalism and objective civilian control. These two level are the power level and the ideological level. The basis for the power level is the relative amount of power held by the military and the civilians. This power level is broken into two dimensions, which are the degree or amount of power (influence) and the scope of the power (authority). These levels will change based on the varying degrees and relative amounts of influence. Where civil-military relations do not fluctuate is the authority, which does not depend on personality of individuals, rather it depends on the position. The degree of influence is a fluid and undetermined factor that no one designates by position.

The ideological level depends on the compatibility of political ideologies with the professional military ethic. Within the ideological level of civil-military relations, Huntington

⁶ Huntington, 73.

identified a variety of ethics or ideologies that are difficult to compare to each other. The military is an ethics-based profession, whereas politicians establish their career by an ideology focused on the state or a political party. With these distinct differences, the point of contention depends on the compatibility of an ideology with the professional military ethic. To mitigate tension, civilians and military must have shared understanding of each other's viewpoint and the platform they represent. Even if the ideology contradicts the military ethic completely, if the military professional has the understanding of why a politician is making specific decisions, it becomes easier to communicate and anticipate each other's choices. Regardless of the levels of power, the amount of influence, or the degree of authority, Huntington identified one universal truth – “In most societies, the relation among power, professionalism, and ideology is a dynamic one, reflecting shifts in the relative power of groups, changing current opinion and thought, and varying threats to national security.”⁷

Where Huntington's theory contradicts mission command was his opinion that the military should have no place in politics, “Politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values.”⁸ This argument contradicts the very essence of teamwork. Exercising the principles of mission command would entail building teams with civilian leaders – which requires providing recommendations and at a minimum, some level of involvement in their decision-making. To make sound recommendations, the military professional must have a degree of understanding of the political climate and relationships between politicians with differing views. The military incorporates detailed and realistic military plans using the military decision making process, which produces plans for execution that they believe will ensure success. This specific planning process does not resonate with the civilian leaders who desire multiple options for

⁷ Huntington, 95.

⁸ Huntington, 71.

consideration. Military plans focus on specific concepts of the ends, ways, and means to achieve success, which does not necessarily translate to the expectations of civilian leaders. Policy makers realize they must rely on military expertise to make decisions; they must also incorporate political objectives into their definition of success.

Elliot Cohen, Professor of Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University, wrote about wartime civil-military relations and later expanded his theory into peacetime. In *Supreme Command*, Cohen examined the wavering line that divides the influence of the military officer from the influence of the politician. Cohen believed that conflict has a dynamic effect on interpersonal relationships between civilian and military leaders. His theory placed responsibility on the politicians to learn the culture of the military. Since the military is subordinate to civilian control, the understanding of that military culture makes it easier for the politicians to make critical decisions that affect the lives of the soldiers fighting. However, Cohen pointed out that, "...the gaps in mutual understanding so large, the differences in personality and background so stark, that the challenges exceed anything found in the civilian sector – which is why, perhaps, these relationships merit close attention."⁹ Cohen's theory suggested the president and the military should base their dialogue on a mutual understanding in which the military provides its best advice to civilian leaders who understand the context of military culture. Regardless of whether or not the president reaches consensus with military advisors, he still has the final word.

Cohen considered the military as experts in the art of war, therefore – they should offer the president operational military options with recommended timelines and the resources required. The military advice should also determine how the conflict might unfold, the potential duration, and the number of forces needed to achieve various objectives or end-states. Relating to that, Davidson said, "Military planners want detailed guidance from civilians regarding end states and objectives

⁹ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesman, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2002): 2.

that civilians often cannot provide up front. While civilians might find this unrealistic, the military considers it absolutely vital and promotes this expectation through its doctrine and education.”¹⁰

Cohen considered the responsibilities, constraints, and expectations of the commander-in-chief. He also defined the roles that both civilian and military play in their exchange of information. According to Janine Davidson, Under Secretary of the Navy, Cohen’s theory “...comes closer to how civilians assume the process should work. It easily follows that where presidents and their civilian advisors subscribe to Cohen and military officers to Huntington (1981), friction is bound to ensue.”¹¹ This discord perpetuates a broken dialogue.

Cohen concluded his theory arguing that the contentious issues are shaping foreign policy, establishing foreign policy conditions, and determining the use of force. He suggested a solution in which politicians participate in dialogue with senior military officers, because “a politician finds himself managing military alliances, deciding the nature of acceptable risk, shaping operational choices, and reconstructing military organizations; civilian policy makers must therefore have the final say on the conduct and execution of policies and strategy.”¹² Cohen’s theory relates to the principles of mission command, but he missed the fact that the responsibilities of learning culture applies to both the civilian leaders and the military professionals. Only through shared understanding of each other’s position, climate, stresses, responsibilities, and influences can both the civilian and military leaders work in cohesion.

When the military officer finds that political objectives are vague or contradictory, there is an expected frustration. Cohen’s theory suggested that when the political elites do not clearly articulate the desired end-state that includes all political considerations and policy ends, the military

¹⁰ Janine Davidson, “The Contemporary Presidency: Civil-Military Friction and the Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43.1 (2013): 140.

¹¹ Davidson, 133.

¹² Cohen, 10.

professional has a difficult time determining the ways and means to achieve the mission – often leading to disagreements over strategy. The mission of the military is to develop and execute military plans that achieve the political objectives. Politicians do not determine political objectives based on military plans. Cohen concluded that the line between civilian and military leadership should clearly define the roles and responsibilities for the leaders the United States entrusts to maintain National Security. Civilian leaders must understand and communicate with their military leaders to determine policy – as war is policy and the politicians are ultimately responsible for sending the military to war.

Peter D. Feaver, an associate professor of political science at Duke University and director of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, wrote *Armed Servants*, a book that takes a different approach to analyzing the relationship between the military and their civilian counterparts. Feaver based his theory on a principle-agency framework, which is a methodology developed by economists to examine the agency problem of employer-employee relationships. Feaver defined civilian control as subordination of a competent, professional military to the ends of policy as determined by civilian authority. Feaver's primary argument was that the strategic interaction between civilian principles and military agents is the essence of civil-military relations. His agency theory explored how politicians control or monitor the behavior of subordinates in a hierarchical setting. Civilians have legitimate authority over the military, so Feaver's theory explored how civilians manage that control. One problem that Feaver studied with the agency theory is that of delegating control versus abdication of political control, "The primary claim of the principal-agent literature is that delegation need not be an abdication of responsibility."¹³

Feaver's view of humanity is pessimistic, at best. His agency theory rests on three tenants as it applies to the relationships between politicians and senior military officers. The military will

¹³ Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003): 55.

‘shirk’ when they are not monitored, they will work better when the goals of the military and civilians coincide, and they will work despite not being monitored if they think they will be punished when caught shirking. His theory assumes that subordinates in a hierarchical setting have a predisposition of misbehaving and that without civilian control, the military will “shirk” its duties. According to Feaver, shirking is behavior that contradicts the principle’s intent. In the case of the military, Feaver referred to shirking as the military conducting business without regard for policy or orders, but behavior that would not incur punishment. Feaver stated that civilian leaders could not express openly the complexities of political calculations and decisions to their military leaders.¹⁴ This dilemma creates a breakdown of shared understanding.

Johnson and Metz said, “The second enduring issue concerns the loyalty of officers within the framework of civilian control. Clearly, this loyalty should lie somewhere outside officers’ individual desires or even the good of their service.”¹⁵ Allegiance distinguishes the US military from the coup-prone or corrupt institutions found in other parts of the world. Does the military loyalty reside with the commander-in-chief, the national interest, or the Constitution? Usually, there is no divergence or incompatibility between the three. Legally and ethically, the military should be loyal to the Constitution. The military swears allegiance to the Constitution, not the President. While this concept is clear, it is not realistic. The Truman-MacArthur dispute was a result of the general’s “novel and dangerous interpretation of civil-military relations” in which an officer could ignore the president in the name of national interest.¹⁶

Dale R. Herspring is a distinguished professor from the Political Science Department at Kansas State University. His theory expanded on Feaver’s theory and the relationship principle. He described civil-military relations in terms of culture and understanding of culture between civilian

¹⁴ Feaver, 25.

¹⁵ Johnson and Metz, 20.

¹⁶ Mark Perry, *Four Stars* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989): 257-259.

and military leaders. His base assumption was that the military is no longer apolitical and that the “military is now a bureaucratic interest group much like others in Washington.”¹⁷ Herspring’s point of view was that the civil-military conflict is inevitable, but does not have to be dysfunctional. There is a way to mitigate conflict if civilians worked within and understood the military culture. His theory most closely represents the mission command philosophy and principles than any of the other theories discussed.

According to his theory, the conflict between senior military leaders and political officials is often intense on occasion, but mild under different circumstances. He believed that the severity of the conflict between leaders directly correlates to the service or military culture and the lack of understanding by civilian leaders. This relates to the mission command principles to build trust and gain a shared understanding. As much as civilians or politicians need to understand military culture, military professionals need to have an understanding of the political climate. Shared understanding extends beyond the scope of the political or strategic environment. Shared understanding includes the ability to see things from another’s perspective with an open mind.

Herspring applied his theory to case studies using two questions, does the president’s leadership style mirror or violate service or military culture, and does that style affect civil military relations? In addition, did the service or military culture change at such a fundamental level or did they apply new methods to oppose those changes? He stated that there is more to civil-military relations than the focus of an apolitical military. The military will always be political if political action is a struggle for resources, autonomy, and influence. Herspring’s theory explored how the military views the political world and why conflict arises between military officers and politicians.

Herspring evaluated military culture using two characteristics: presidential leadership style, and service and military culture. With each new president, there will be a certain level of change

¹⁷ Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 1.

and the military will adapt to different leadership styles. “The military expects strong political leadership; however, in the process of being led, the country’s senior military officers expect to be consulted by the president and to be granted access to him or her.”¹⁸ The military will evaluate the president’s leadership based on four issues of service military culture: the use of force, roles, mission, and resources, personnel policies, and responsibility and honor. These four issues are inextricably a direct link to the principles of mission command, more so than any other civil-military relations theorist does.

When the military deploys to a conflict, the use of force is a sensitive and critical issue. According to Davidson, “Powerful cultural factors lead to certain predispositions by military planners regarding the appropriate use of military force, the best way to employ force to ensure ‘victory,’ and even what constitutes ‘victory’ in the American way of war.”¹⁹ If the military expects to use force, Herspring said that they prefer to have a clear chain of command, clear and unambiguous guidance, strategic decision-making, and operational and tactical autonomy. The use of force issue closely resembles the mission command principles of Provide a Clear Commanders Intent and Use Mission Orders. The military operates using orders, so it is imperative that they know where and from whom in their chain of command the orders are coming. They must be clear and unambiguous – the intent must be clear. Military officers expect civilians to make strategic decisions that affect the military, but they prefer autonomy when it comes to their profession of operations and tactics.

The military understanding their roles and missions and having resources relies on the president’s respect for the military enterprise. The military understands that politicians have to make difficult decisions with force structure and missions, but they expect the president to respect the expertise of senior military officers and advisors. Personnel policies are an area where the

¹⁸ Herspring. 15

¹⁹ Davidson, 131.

military truly prefers non-interference from politicians. While civilians make key senior appointments, the military would rather make their own policies regarding personnel decisions. Finally, the military expects responsibility and honor of civilian leadership, which should be mutual and reciprocated at every level.

Literature Review Conclusion

Understanding previous civil-military theories makes it possible to identify the gaps in which application of the mission command principles can improve civil-military relations. These theories provide sound explanation for why civil-military tension exists, but do not necessarily provide reasonable, contemporary solutions. Huntington opened doors for theory as the country changed to a full-time professional military force, which raised concerns as civilian control over the military became increasingly significant. Feaver and Herspring both analyze the cultural aspects of civil military theory, but still lack contemporary solutions to mitigate tension. What previous theories do an excellent job of communicating is the importance of civilian control. The subordinate relationship of the military to the civilian leadership is law and governed by the Constitution. The purpose of civilian control of the military is to ensure that employment of military forces is a reflection of American values and traditions, through the politicians elected into office. The beliefs of the American people ideally shape national policy through their civilian leaders. Johnson and Metz say that, "...the objective is a competent, professional military able to contribute to national security policymaking but not dominate it..."²⁰

Methodology

Historical case studies will demonstrate how the application of mission command principles to civil-military relationships could have caused the outcome to be different, or at least prevented tension and discord. To establish a basis for comparison, this monograph will first

²⁰ Johnson and Metz, 22.

provide an overview of the Army's mission command methodology and then discuss predominant theories on civil-military relations. An understanding of these theories provides the context to examine two case studies: the Korean War with President Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur, and the Cuban Missile Crisis with President John F. Kennedy's Administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This also includes the context for discussing how mission command principles apply to specific events. Civilian and military leaders will be able to analyze, comprehend, reflect, and determine ways to implement mission command principles and the philosophy of mission command in future civil-military relationships.

When senior military advisors and policy makers have differences in opinion as well as varying levels of expertise and experience, there is the potential for disagreement and tension. This tension often causes conflict. In these situations, a clear commander's intent and delineation of duties and responsibilities can open the lines of communication. This is critical to successful development of strategy. With a distinct link between the national ends, ways, and means with the strategy to obtain those ends, it is possible to achieve national objectives and implement policy. Exercising mission command means both military and civilian leadership demonstrating principles of mission command and the mission command philosophy. Civilian leaders must acknowledge the difficulty that senior military leaders face when and if they disagree with a plan or policy. In addition, senior military leaders must acknowledge that they are not politicians and that they must follow lawful orders, which means exercising disciplined initiative and using mission orders. Both military and civilian leaders must also realize that applying these principles also allows them to accept prudent risk because they have established trust and developed cohesive relationships.

Definitions

Military and civilian leaders use terminology and expressions that relate to civil-military relationships. For this analysis, civilian leadership refers to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and other civilian leaders in the President's administration. Military leadership includes the

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Chiefs, and Combatant Commanders, as well as senior military officers in positions of influence. The Chairman is the senior military advisor to the president. As such, he has the obligation to provide positive and negative opinions of the service chiefs and contribute to the decisions that shape strategy. While there are other influential military and civilian leaders, the focus will be specifically on the relationship between the civilian and military leadership listed above. Any of these leaders may interact with each other, but according to Johnson and Metz, “The interface between the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff is probably the single most important one in American civil-military relations.”²¹ This relationship differs from one administration to the next. The tension created over the distribution of power at times can result in a confusing definition of military involvement in policy-making.

Civil-Military Relations

Civil-military relations refers to the relationship between the armed forces of the state and the politicians of the society in which they serve, how they communicate, interact, and how the government structures their interface.

Mission Command

Mission Command is “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”²²

Variables: Mission Command Principles

To examine the events in which civilian leaders and military officers disagreed on the courses of action during conflict, where the principles of mission command could have prevented

²¹ Johnson and Metz, 18.

²² Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1.

discourse, there must be an understanding of the philosophy of mission command, the principles of mission command, and the nature of military operations. This understanding must then apply to and be relevant to civil military relationships. Many variables affect the outcomes of civil-military dissent. One set of variables to explore are the principles of mission command. The intent is to look at these variables individually and their impact on civil military relationships, and gain an understanding of how military and civilian leaders might enhance their communication through the mission command philosophy. “Through mission command, commanders initiate and integrate all military functions and actions toward a common goal—mission accomplishment.”²³ Ultimately, these principles are most effective when leaders apply them in unison.

The mission command philosophy of command is one of the foundations of unified land operations in which human interactions form the basis of military organizations. Leaders apply the philosophy of mission command to exploit and enhance uniquely human skills, which allows them to balance the art of command with the science of control.” The degree to which commanders employ mission command depends on their experience and the environment. Through mission command, Army commanders are able to empower subordinate leaders and place an emphasis on initiative in a decentralized environment with complex and rapidly changing conditions. The principles of mission command are build cohesive teams through mutual trust; create shared understanding; provide a clear commander’s intent; exercise disciplined initiative; use mission orders; and accept prudent risk.²⁴

Understanding the art of command means understanding the human aspects of command and requires leadership. “Leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”²⁵ Leaders

²³ ADP 6-0, 1.

²⁴ ADP 6-0.

²⁵ ADP 6-0, 6.

exercise the art of command through their leadership, effective communication, and encouraging collaboration and dialogue. Applying mission command to civil military relationships means integrating all of our actions towards a common goal – our country’s national security, which puts the United States in a position to “...safeguard our national interests through strong and sustainable leadership. It sets the principles and priorities to guide the use of American power and influence in the world.”²⁶ With civil-military relationships, all forms of leadership must demonstrate their understanding of mission command and work in cohesion as leaders to make informed decisions for the benefit of national security and the interests of the American people. The principles of mission command are not individual entities, but principles that work in unison and directly influence each other. In the philosophy of mission command, it is fundamental to understand human interaction. This includes an appreciation for personality dynamics, which can help to prevent controversy.

Through collaboration and dialogue, commanders and leaders are better able to understand the human factors that influence how organizations function and accomplish missions. Exercising mission command also means that commanders adapt to the changes in the nature of armed conflict and national security, which requires them to communicate with civilian leaders. The military continues to work closely with civilian leaders, both in the government and through other agencies associated with the government. This work increases the necessity for effortless relationships. This pertains to all levels of operations from the strategic level down to the tactical level, requiring junior leaders to have the same communication skills as the most senior leaders.

Commanders and staffs apply the science of control using objectivity, facts, empirical methods, and analysis to overcome operational constraints to understand the measurable aspects of operations. These include the physical capabilities and limitations of friendly and enemy organizations and systems. The science of control supports the art of command. Commanders use

²⁶ Barack Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Executive Office of The President (Washington, DC: 2015), 1.

the science of control in a dynamic and complex environment, so that they are able to account for changing circumstances. Commanders rely on the science of control to have continuous flow of information between the commander, staff, subordinates, and unified action partners. “Commanders and staff maintain a continuous information flow to update their understanding. The science of control depends on information, communication, structure, and degree of control.”²⁷

Build Cohesive Teams through Mutual Trust

“Build cohesive teams through mutual trust: Mutual trust is shared confidence among commanders, subordinates, and partners.”²⁸ Successful commanders take the time to gain and earn trust to build a cohesive team. To gain trust, leaders uphold the Army values and practice effective leadership without taking shortcuts. Leaders can build or lose trust through everyday interactions. Leaders gain trust by sharing experiences of both failure and success, and by communicating with their Soldiers and building interpersonal relationships. By doing this, they gain a reputation for sharing hardships and putting Soldiers’ needs above their own. This also demonstrates a commander’s ability to communicate by giving their Soldiers access to share ideas and concepts.

The Army relies on effective teams to achieve objectives and accomplish missions. The ability to build teams through mutual trust and maintain effective, cohesive teams throughout military operations is an essential skill for all Army commanders, staffs, and leaders. To build cohesive teams, members of both the military and the civilian communities need to have an appreciation for the fundamentals of team building. For a group of people to work together effectively as a team, all team members must have established trust.

Trust is the degree of confidence and reliability that people develop with each other. “Teams with solid trust among their team members are better equipped to predict what each team

²⁷ ADP 6-0, 8.

²⁸ ADP 6-0, 2.

member will do. Team leaders foster trust and commitment through shared experiences to build relationships that result in trust.”²⁹ Given a high level of trust, civilians and military would be better equipped to predict each other’s behaviors and respond quickly in changing circumstances.

Understanding team dynamics is also an important aspect of building and maintaining effective teams. Team dynamics are the behavioral relationships between members of a group who connect within an organization. Team members who trust each other are usually willing to settle differences and suspend any doubts. This allows the entire team to focus on their duties and accomplish the mission. Sharing experience with each other over time allows team members to develop deeper levels of shared trust. Effective leaders build this kind of trust in their teams over time by behaving consistently and predictably, and by placing the needs of the team before their personal needs.

Create Shared Understanding

“A defining challenge for commanders and staffs is creating shared understanding of their operational environment, their operation’s purpose, its problems, and approaches to solving them.”³⁰ Commanders and staffs actively build and maintain shared understanding within the force and with unified action partners by maintaining collaboration and dialogue throughout the operations process (planning, preparation, execution, and assessment). Shared understanding and purpose form the basis for unity of effort and trust. Collaboration between commanders and staffs is an effective way to establish interpersonal relationships and build trust. This exchange of ideas increases the overall situational understanding for the whole team. It takes time and effort to create shared understanding and an environment that encourages the sharing of ideas. Commanders must create the conditions that facilitate shared understanding.

²⁹ Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-22.6, *Army Team Building* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015) 1-4.

³⁰ ADP 6-0.

Provide a Clear Commander's Intent

The commander's intent is a clear and concise expression that states the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state. This helps the staff to focus and helps subordinate and supporting commanders to act and achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation changes. The commander's intent nests with the intent of their higher commander, which provides the basis for unity of effort throughout the larger force. The commander's intent communicates the task, purpose, and desired outcome so that forces understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. When Soldiers understand the broader purpose beyond the mission statement, it is easier to gain shared understanding and maintain unity of effort.

Commanders should collaborate and exchange ideas with their subordinates to ensure they understand the commander's intent. Subordinates who comprehend the commander's intent are more likely to exercise initiative in unexpected situations. For successful operations, the commander's intent must provide the proper guidance for staffs to plan the ends, ways, and means. This requires clear communication between civilian policy makers, the commander in chief, and senior military commanders. Clear communication makes a clear commanders intent possible. A clear commander's intent prevents subordinates from making interpretations of a vague order. Donald Bletz said, "If each professional military officer were to defend the constitution as he interpreted it individually without reference to the administration in power, the American democratic system would be unworkable."³¹

Exercise Disciplined Initiative

"Disciplined initiative is action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise."³² Disciplined initiative means

³¹ Donald F. Bletz, *The Role of the Military Professional in US Foreign Policy* (New York; Praeger, 1972): 167-168.

³² ADP 6-0, 4.

creating opportunities to take action. Leaders rely on subordinates to have a willingness to act in the absence of orders. When commanders provide subordinates a clear intent with defined limits, this enables and empowers subordinates to develop and maintain an operational initiative. When subordinates feel empowered by commanders, they have the confidence to act and apply sound judgment – because they know the commanders intent, the purpose of the mission, and the desired end state. When exercising disciplined initiative, commanders and subordinates must always follow lawful orders, and only deviate when the orders are unlawful. It is the responsibility of the subordinate to inform their commander as the soonest possibility when they have deviated from a lawful order. “Adhering to applicable laws and regulations when exercising disciplined initiative builds credibility and legitimacy. Straying beyond legal boundaries undermines trust and jeopardizes tactical, operational, and strategic success.”³³

Use Mission Orders

“*Mission orders* are directives that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them. Mission orders provide direction and guidance that focus activities to achieve the objective, set priorities, allocate resources, and influence the situation. Commanders and staffs publish orders that provide subordinates maximum freedom of action to determine how to best accomplish their missions. Orders expand individual initiative; however, mission orders do not relinquish the commander’s responsibility to supervise subordinates during execution. Leaders should not micromanage, but should always intervene when and if the mission requires change.

Accept Prudent Risk

“Prudent risk is a deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost.”³⁴ Commanders,

³³ ADP 6-0, 4

³⁴ ADP 6-0, 5.

through experience and trust in their subordinates, accept prudent risk when making decisions. Uncertainty exists in all military operations, but so does opportunity. Opportunities come with risks. The willingness to accept prudent risk often enables subordinate commanders to expose enemy weaknesses. Both civilian and military leaders must determine risks, analyze and minimize as many hazards as possible, and then take prudent risks to exploit opportunities. The less politicians are willing to accept risk, the greater they feel they must control the military. Civilian leaders therefore must learn to accept risk so that military commanders do not feel that they must perpetually avoid risk at all costs. Military leaders must understand, however, that politicians have the responsibility to accept risk and the costs associated with accepting that risk in the eyes of the American people. Civil-military relations depend on acceptable levels of prudent risk based on the trust they establish through exercising all of the principles of mission command.

Mission Command Theory

Field Marshal Hermuth von Moltke of the Prussian Army laid the foundation for what would become Mission Command doctrine and the mission command philosophy, a shared understanding of the environment to provide clear orders. “Moltke’s innovative application of military theory influenced warfare for more than a century, and military leaders and theorists even today quote him frequently.”³⁵ Moltke felt that leaders must deal with uncertainty with a steady nature during conflict. A commander’s personal experience and the nature of their environment influences their execution of mission command and defining their command vision. Moltke believed in a flexible and decentralized style of command that focused on timely decision-making, training and education, and the relationships between commander and subordinates.³⁶

³⁵ Gunter Rosseels, *Moltke's Mission Command Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century: Fallacy or Verity?* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2012): 2.

³⁶ Helmoth Von Moltke, *War Lessons, Volume IV, Part II*, trans. by: Harry Bell (Berlin: The Great General Staff, Military-Historical Section I, 1911): 25.

Moltke also emphasized that commanders clearly articulate their intent to empower subordinates and develop mutual trust. This trust enables Soldiers to understand their role and duties, to think independently, thereby creating dedication and commitment to the team and act on their instincts.³⁷

Case Studies

Korean War: MacArthur and Truman

The relationship between President Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, is one of the most significant and well-documented cases of civil-military tension. MacArthur's public disagreement with U.S foreign policy in Korea ultimately led to his dismissal. At the onset of the Korean War, Truman set out to confront communism with a limited war policy he thought would prevent a large-scale conflict – not only on the Korean Peninsula, but also throughout the rest of the world.³⁸ General MacArthur may have had a solid military strategy for Korea, but he failed to appreciate Truman's policy of limited war and the political ramifications of harsh military action. He also failed to gain the trust and confidence in his senior civilian leadership. The principal causes for the relief of General MacArthur from his duties in the Far East in April of 1951 were from a lack of agreement and accord between the Truman Administration and General MacArthur as to the basic policy pursued in the Korean conflict. Another cause was General MacArthur's public participation in politics and his use of media to voice his dissatisfaction with the Administration's policies in the Far East.³⁹

Johnson and Metz argue that the most dangerous approach for a military officer, when he is convinced that the president or official policy is wrong, is for that officer to act on his own interpretation of the Constitution or national interest, "This, of course, was MacArthur's position.

³⁷ Rosseels, 4.

³⁸ Richard H. Rovere, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, *General MacArthur and President Truman: The Struggle for Control of American Foreign Policy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992): 239.

³⁹ Allen R. Potter "The Truman-MacArthur Controversy: A Study in Political-Military Relations." master's thesis, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1972): 121-123.

The pitfalls are obvious. To make it work, officers must be experts on constitutional law and the national interest.”⁴⁰ This section will examine the historical sequence of events of the Truman and MacArthur case study and identify situations where applying the principles of mission command could have prevented conflict and civil-military tension. During the Korean conflict, Truman believed the United States would prevent the spread of communism with a policy of containment. Truman thought he was preventing World War III with a limited war strategy, as his administration thought a conflict with Communist China would provoke a response from the Soviet Union. Truman would later publish in his memoirs,

Every decision I made in connection with the Korean conflict had this one aim in mind: to prevent a third world war and the terrible destruction it would bring to the civilized world. This meant that we should not do anything that would provide an excuse to the Soviets and plunge the free nations into full-scale all-out-war.⁴¹

The administration’s level of commitment to specific global regions would influence the civil-military tension that began and continued to escalate between MacArthur and Truman.

The Korean War was the first conflict that tested the new national security structure established in 1947. Although relations between the president, the Joint Chiefs, and the Secretary of Defense improved, the relationship between the president as the commander in chief and the senior military commander was still vague. There was still a significant disconnect between political objectives and the military strategy to attain them. President Truman, along with his cabinet and military advisers, believed containing the situation in Korea and preventing further escalation was the best option for the United States.⁴² Keeping the Korean War as a small regional conflict was critical to the success of the US strategy. President Truman did not believe escalating the conflict was the right option for the United States because he did not want the country entangled into a

⁴⁰ Johnson and Metz, 21.

⁴¹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S Truman, Year of Decision* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1955): 345.

⁴² Rovere and Schlesinger, 62.

wider conflict. The intent of the policy of containment and limited conflict with China was to avert a response from the Soviet Union to prevent the conflict from becoming a global confrontation.⁴³

On October 15, 1950, President Truman met with General MacArthur at Wake Island to discuss the progress of the war. This meeting was of public concern because of the MacArthur's discourteous refusal to meet the President in the continental United States. The Wake Island conference was also Truman's opportunity to boost his reputation, posing with the great hero, MacArthur. Truman would later write about the Wake Island meeting, "The first and simplest reason why I wanted to meet with General MacArthur -was that we had never had any personal contacts at all, and I thought that he ought to know his Commander in Chief and that I ought to know the senior field commander in the Far East."⁴⁴ Though the meeting at Wake Island was a public affairs success for both Truman and MacArthur, the two personalities did not resolve anything. If anything, it increased the distrust between them.

As the conflict continued, MacArthur grew increasingly frustrated with Truman's lack of resolve and constraints on his military strategy. Though MacArthur was not anticipating a Chinese attack, the conflict escalated in late November with an overwhelming Chinese attack. At this point, MacArthur wanted to deliver a decisive blow, which he thought was the best option to cause the complete collapse of the communist regime of China. He felt that a more forceful response was necessary, which would entail delivering decisive action. This action would include a naval blockade of China and bombing of Manchuria. MacArthur also wanted to use Chinese Nationalist forces from Taiwan, with United Nations Forces in Korea to achieve his objectives.⁴⁵ On January 13, 1951, Truman sent MacArthur a message with conflicting guidance. Truman reinforced the

⁴³ Michael D. Pearlman, *Truman and MacArthur: The Winding Road to Dismissal* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2006): 23.

⁴⁴ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1955): 362-363.

⁴⁵ Pearlman, 36.

intent of his policy, but also acknowledged the lack of military resources to enable MacArthur to achieve those ends. Truman told MacArthur, “We recognize, of course, that continued resistance might not be militarily possible with the limited forces...”⁴⁶ But the Truman administration was still intent on defending Japan. MacArthur felt this was complete lack of support and felt the increased limitations from the president. Due to this lack of support, MacArthur would begin to extend his political influence.

The tension between Truman and MacArthur became a direct reflection of ignoring the non-partisan role that the military is supposed to uphold. Truman later wrote about MacArthur that he was “...without any real appreciation of the larger political implications of the war he was fighting.”⁴⁷ However, MacArthur felt that the Truman’s strategic policy would prolong the conflict and pull the United States into an extended war. MacArthur felt that using all available means for a decisive victory would be swift and successful. His strategic view was strictly military; it lacked the political component under which President Truman was operating.

To prevent his dismissal, MacArthur might have gained momentum by voicing his opinions, however political they may have been, through the appropriate US government executive and legislative channels and not circumvent his chain of command. There is general affirmation among scholars, authors, and writers on the subject that General MacArthur violated one of the fundamental principles in civil-military relations by his political partisan actions in siding with or supporting Republican members of Congress against President Truman. According to Pearlman, “While initially reluctant, the Joint Chiefs eventually played a pivotal role when Truman fired MacArthur, as Truman sought their support to help stem a public perception that the political realm

⁴⁶ Rovere and Schlesinger, 104.

⁴⁷ Roy K. Flint, “The Truman-MacArthur Conflict: Dilemmas of Civil-Military Relations in the Nuclear Age,” in Kohn ed., *The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States*. (New York: New York University Press 1991): 225.

was overly influencing the military.”⁴⁸ The major policy issue that drove the wedge between President Truman and General MacArthur was over the foreign policy strategy employed during the Korean War. If Truman and MacArthur developed trust in each other from the onset of the conflict, and if they had maintained productive dialogue with a clear commander’s intent, the sequence of events might have been different.

Cuban Missile Crisis: JFK, Robert Kennedy, McNamara, & the Joint Chiefs

Elements that contributed to the US civil-military tension of the Cuban Missile Crisis included a high level of stress, ideological disputes, and the need to present the people of America with a popular policy outcome. The proliferation of nuclear weapons changed the civil military relationship significantly during the administration of President John F. Kennedy. During his presidency, “...the particular scrutiny of decisions and decision processes has to do with the dangerous nature of nuclear weapons and the burden of decision on leadership created by their existence.”⁴⁹ The armed forces became key factors to policy making and the military became an even more significant instrument of national power. “The intensity and pace of nuclear crisis create a climate that would seem to distort perception and mitigate against effective decision making.”⁵⁰

At the beginning of Kennedy’s administration, Kennedy embraced new procedures to gain fresh ideas and creative results. “He began by overhauling the policymaking organization he would be expected to deal with the most – the National Security Council.”⁵¹ In a changing political climate, Kennedy created a new opportunity for building relationships and developing cohesion.

⁴⁸ Michael D. Pearlman, *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 178-180.

⁴⁹ Karen Guttieri, Michael D. Wallace, and Peter Suedfeld. “The Integrative Complexity of American Decision Makers in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 39(4), 596.

⁵⁰ Guttieri, et al, 601.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Arthur Larsen and Erin R. Mahan, *The Ascendancy of the Secretary of Defense: Robert S. McNamara, 1961-1963* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013): 3.

For Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of the Defense, the new system had definite advantages, removing layers of bureaucracy, which granted McNamara access to the President on any important issue he felt needed Kennedy's attention. The new system also expedited the decision-making exchange between them. "McNamara played a greater role in foreign affairs than any previous Secretary of Defense. He accepted the conventional wisdom that defense policy derived from foreign policy and that the Defense Department should serve and assist the State Department."⁵²

While this change streamlined communication between Kennedy and the Secretary, the change had a completely adverse effect on the military services. Downgrading the National Security Council meant loss of access to the White House and loss of coordination between the Service Chiefs and McNamara. What set the precedent for tension between Kennedy and the Joint Chiefs was the Bay of Pigs failure in 1961. "The biggest losers were the Joint Chiefs, whose advice became increasingly suspect in Kennedy's eyes following the Bay of Pigs fiasco in the spring of 1961."⁵³ Reflecting his doubt about advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President appointed former Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor as his White House-based military advisor. Taylor's job was to double-check the military advice coming from the Service Chiefs.

Kennedy exemplified some mission command principles with parts of his administration, including the close relationship he had with McNamara, "McNamara's success in imposing his views and influence derived from the close and cordial relationship that he and the President enjoyed. More than being simply business associates, they socialized together and consulted regularly on all manner of issues, not just defense or national security."⁵⁴ Senior officials and their staffs developed personal relationships. Many who joined the administration already knew one another from having worked together in Democratic Party politics.

⁵² Larsen & Mahan, 4.

⁵³ Larsen & Mahan, 4-5.

⁵⁴ Larsen & Mahan, ix.

Early in his presidency, Kennedy accepted that the United States would need to act against Fidel Castro's regime, but he feared that an invasion by Cuban exiles would thwart any diplomatic efforts that his administration was working on. The Bay of Pigs turned out to be a complete fiasco. CIA meeting notes later revealed that they predicted failure by the Cuban exiles without help from the United States. Kennedy was adamant about not using US airpower in order to maintain deniability in planning and supporting the invasion. The Joint Chiefs knew that the mission would fail without US airpower, but Kennedy felt that the use of airpower would result in retribution from Moscow and from other parts of the world. The CIA and the Joint Chiefs were convinced that once the invasion launched, Kennedy would authorize any action required to prevent failure. However, he did not. There was a complete lack of shared understanding and trust.

After the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy felt that he was naïve in trusting the military's judgment regarding the operation's capability of success, and he grew skeptical of the Chiefs' suggestions and advice. The disaster deepened Kennedy's uncertainty about listening to his military advisors from the Pentagon and other advisors from the CIA. However, Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, knew that the United States would eventually have to deal with Cuba. The Bay of Pigs reinforced Kennedy's opinion that he would have to keep the military under strict control. As it applies to the mission command principle of accepting prudent risk – Kennedy felt he had no room to accept risk with the Joint Chiefs.

In October 1962, the most intense event involving East-West relations occurred when the United States discovered that the Russians placed forty-two medium-range missiles in Cuba. The events that became the Cuban Missile Crisis caused panic in the United States, and the American people feared they were on the verge of nuclear war. There was no historical precedent to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Premier Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, later described the Cuban Missile Crisis as a time when “a smell of

burning hung heavy”⁵⁵ in the air. When the crisis was over and time had passed, both Kennedy and Khrushchev reached the sobering conclusion that they needed to restrain further actions in the nuclear arms race.

The Cuban Missile Crisis began when aerial photos revealed the build-up of Soviet missile sites on Cuba. This began the thirteen days that ended up being possibly the closest thing to a nuclear holocaust that the world has ever experienced. Once the President learned of the Soviets’ actions, he assembled a team that they labeled Ex-Comm, the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. Regardless of the opinions over tactics and courses of action, the members of ExCom agreed that the United States should not allow the missiles to remain in Cuba. Where the Kennedy administration had a definitive set of common goals and a shared understanding was that both groups wanted “...the removal of the Soviet missiles without starting a war between the superpowers, the retention of public support within the United States, and minimal cost to the Kennedy administration.”⁵⁶

At the beginning of the crisis, President Kennedy was concerned that events might go out of control, so he kept US actions tightly under control. The Joint Chiefs favored a full-scale, five-day campaign against the missile sites of the Soviets, with the probability of invading the island with ground troops shortly thereafter. Kennedy rejected this approach, fearing that it would increase the likelihood of a far greater struggle. “...the need to maintain consensus in the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) was perceived by the president as a greater pressure than any external strategic considerations.”⁵⁷

During the ExComm meetings, the Kennedy Administration pored over the details of what steps to take to deal with the Soviet’s movement of missiles into Cuba, but instead of feeling that

⁵⁵ Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 48.

⁵⁶ Guttieri, et al, 605.

⁵⁷ Guttieri, et al, 604.

ExComm had analyzed each course of action carefully, Kennedy and his closest advisors maintained a feeling of uncertainty and pressure. Robert Kennedy would publish in his memoir about his brother, "Inexplicably, I thought of when he was ill and almost died; when he lost his child, when we learned that our oldest brother had been killed; of personal times of strain and hurt. The voices droned on, but I didn't seem to hear anything...."⁵⁸ The president was convinced that the Soviet Union also wanted to avoid nuclear war over Cuba, but was concerned that they were forcing Khrushchev into an "irrational" nuclear response. Kennedy sought to give Khrushchev room to maneuver and find a graceful way to withdraw, so Kennedy rejected actions that might push the Soviets into a corner. While bringing military pressure to bear, through such means as intensifying aerial overflights, they avoided direct and early-armed confrontations, and pursued diplomatic avenues in parallel in the United Nations and not directly with the Soviet government.

Kennedy's decision to impose a blockade, instead of an air strike or an invasion, was typical of his approach. Since a blockade was by law an act of war, the Kennedy administration referred to the action as a quarantine. Later in the crisis, even after the downing American reconnaissance plane over Cuba and the receipt of the "tougher" letter from the Soviet foreign ministry, the president still rejected military recommendations for an air strike, refusing to attack and expressing the desire to find less risky alternatives. Even with all the cautious behavior to avoid nuclear war, to ensure removal of the missiles, Kennedy was prepared to take actions, which may well have had this result. According to McNamara, there was no acceptable prudent risk during the Cuban Missile Crisis, McNamara later said, "In conventional war, mistakes cost lives, sometimes thousands of lives. However, if mistakes were to affect decisions relating to the use of nuclear forces, there would be no learning curve."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (with "Afterword" by Richard Neustadt and Graham T. Allison) (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1971): 48.

⁵⁹ Robert S. McNamara, "Apocalypse Soon." *Foreign Policy* (2005): 34.

Despite the disagreement over which course of action would work, all of the US officials recognized that an air strike, alone or followed by an invasion, would increase the risk of nuclear war. The Soviets could retaliate from Cuba with surviving missiles, undertake reciprocal action against US missiles in Turkey, or launch a major move against Berlin. If the Soviet response led the president to use nuclear weapons, Kennedy knew that was a threat to all humanity. Using the principle of mission command, create shared understanding – when a critical decision needs to be made, all courses of action must be analyzed, and the decision-maker must have all of those courses of action available to him to consider, which could have included military action and political policy with varying degrees of each. A situation like this requires all parties to understand all aspects of both the strategic and political ramifications of applying that level of force. Since the desired outcome was to return stability to the strategic situation, both the Joint Chiefs and Kennedy's administration should have developed an appreciation for the others' position.

The balance required to maintain civilian control over the military in the Cuban Missile Crisis was challenging, but crucial. "It was also McNamara's firm commitment to civilian control of the military and his willingness to run interference for the White House in dealing with the military establishment. These characteristics would be exhibited in abundance during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962."⁶⁰ The decision to execute a naval blockade became a definitive example of the dilemma over civilian control of the military. While Kennedy did everything he could to manage and control the primary instrument of pressure on the Soviets, the blockage run by the Navy, he still faced a tough struggle with his senior military officials. What struck Kennedy and McNamara soon after they decided to implement the blockade: they wondered what exactly they had ordered the Navy to do. Kennedy decided to move the blockade closer to Cuba to give the Russian ships more time, but the navy disregarded his command.

⁶⁰ Larsen & Mahan, 27-28.

What Kennedy's administration accomplished was a masterful maneuver to influence the Soviet Union to withdraw the missiles in the thirteen-day crisis, which has become the primary historical example of military force harnessed by national policy using negotiation and intimidation. McNamara would later reflect, "No sane man wants nuclear war, or any kind of war. But war has to be conceivable in support of vital national interests. *Otherwise* you have no real national power."⁶¹ Even though the Kennedy administration was successful in avoiding a nuclear disaster, they still could have prevented unnecessary tension by applying mission command principles. Both the civilian leaders and military advisors could have established trust and developed better interpersonal relationships by reflecting on their experiences of both failure and success.

Conclusion – A Mission Command Approach

A mission command approach to civil-military relationships and conflict applies to the historical examples of the Korean War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. A conflict between a president's national policy and the commander's military strategy often leads to a civil-military disconnect. "If the military chooses senior leaders so focused on the military element of national power that they are unable to deal with the subtle complexity of strategy, then its role in policymaking should be limited. If civilian participants are more politicians than strategists, then the military- if it generates senior leaders who are astute strategists- may have to assume greater responsibilities."⁶²

Because human nature and the nature of war are unpredictable, it is a challenge for theorists to define a clear cause for civil-military tension. Because the role of the military is subordinate to that of politicians, the perception that the military commanders are to blame is common. The strategic vision of civilian leaders and the ways and means employed by their military should work

⁶¹ Robert S. McNamara, *Public Statements of Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, 1962, Vol. IV*. (Boston, MA: John F. Kennedy Library, 1962).

⁶² Johnson and Metz, 18.

in cooperation. When nations determine the desired course of action is war, they must also determine how it will conduct the conflict. These decisions have the potential to produce civil-military tension between policy makers and senior military commanders. “It is impossible to imagine why civilian policy makers will develop national security strategies for the Army to accomplish and not resource it with all the requirements to achieve them.”⁶³

For civilian leaders who are responsible for United States policy to understand military capabilities and requirements is for them to give the military professionals a voice and a forum to communicate their recommended courses of action. It is also the military professionals’ responsibility to understand the political, economic, social, and diplomatic elements of policy. These elements have the potential to create freedom of maneuver for military commanders or completely constrain their every movement. “Successful civil-military relationship requires partnership with each associate having his or her own part to play and responsibilities to uphold.”⁶⁴ Ultimately, both parties must learn to understand each other’s critical role, have the ability to visualize the situation from their perspective, and make a conscious effort to build a cohesive team.

⁶³ Douglas W. Bennett, “Military Advice and Civil-Military Relations,” Monograph, (School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2010): 3.

⁶⁴ Bennett, 3.

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